

# MASTER SURGEONS OF AMERICA

LEWIS COLEMAN MORRIS

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LEWIS COLEMAN MORRIS was a student, an educator, a leader in progressive movements in the interests of public health and hospitals, and a master surgeon. Though the span of his life was brief, the correct appraisal of it in service to his fellowman entitles him to first rank among the great surgeons, not only of the South, but also among the eminent surgeons of the generation in which he lived. He was a native of Virginia, the state which has given to the nation so many eminent men in education, in law, in statesmanship, in medicine and surgery. He imbibed the spirit of these great men. Tracing his life as a whole the great fundamental principle that guided it was that of preparation for usefulness.

He was a descendant of one of the most distinguished families of Virginia. He was born at Clazemont, Hanover County, Virginia, January 23, 1872. His grandfather, Richard Morris, of Taylor's Creek, Hanover County, a member of the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1829-30, was a man recognized as a leader among the greatest men of his time. His parents were Edward Watts and Matilda Coleman Morris. His father was a member of the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1850-51. His mother, a member of one of the leading families of Virginia, was related by birth to the Minors, the Maurys, and the Dicks. Lewis Coleman Morris, destined for a great career in any vocation, chose that profession in which he believed he could be most useful to his fellowman. While modest and unassuming, he appreciated his heredity, his environment, and his opportunities, and he made the most of them.

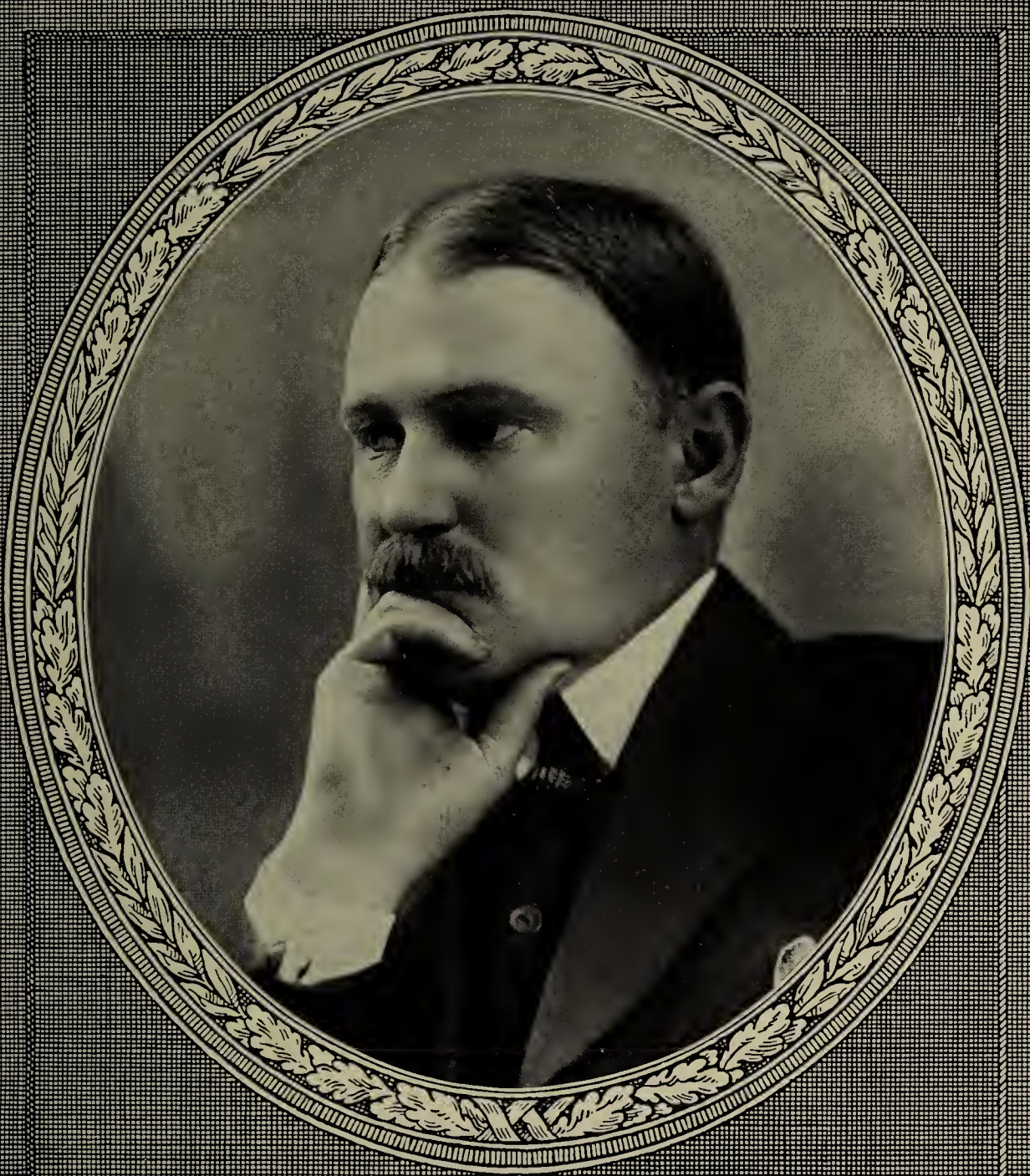
His early education was received at McGuire's School in Richmond, Randolph-Macon College, Ashland, Virginia, and later in the University of North Carolina, at Chapel Hill. His medical education was secured at the University of Virginia from which he graduated in medicine in June, 1892. His unusual work as a student was recognized by his Alma Mater in his appointment as demonstrator of anatomy. After one year's successful service in this position, he resigned and practiced a few months at Salisbury, North Carolina, but in the fall of the same year, 1893, he joined his brother, Dr. Edward Morris, in the practice of surgery in Birmingham, where he spent the remaining thirty years of his active and highly successful career as a leader and honored member of the medical profession in

Alabama. Dr. Edward Morris was one of the most prominent surgeons in Birmingham and one of the most distinguished and learned members of the profession in Alabama. He had a large and lucrative surgical practice. Soon after these brothers began their professional work together they established the Morris Sanatorium which was successfully conducted until 1907. The death of Dr. Edward Morris left Dr. Lewis Coleman Morris a large surgical practice. Dr. Lewis Morris, though greatly grieved because of the untimely death of his older and devoted brother, entered with determination, energy, and enthusiasm into the professional work which had formerly been done by the two. His success was remarkable from the beginning.

At the outbreak of the Spanish-American War in 1898, although busily engaged in his professional duties, he volunteered for service and entered the Army as surgeon of the First Alabama Regiment and served with distinction until peace was declared. On being honorably discharged from the service he resumed his professional duties in Birmingham and was asked by Dr. W. E. B. Davis to become his associate in the chair of gynecology and abdominal surgery in the Birmingham Medical College—a notable honor and distinction, for Dr. Davis was a pioneer in this branch of surgery, and a man of national and international reputation. This association continued until Dr. Davis' death when Lewis Coleman Morris succeeded him as professor of gynecology and abdominal surgery.

There are many things that mark Dr. Morris as an unusual man. It was evident from the beginning of his career in Birmingham that he had used well every possible opportunity in the preparation of himself for the study of medicine; that he had applied himself diligently as a student of medicine while in college; and that he had availed himself of, and used well, every possible opportunity for continuing his education after graduation. One could not be associated with him without being impressed with his appreciation of the great men in the profession who had done such notable work in pioneering the way for all that is possible in the prevention and cure of disease. It was his desire to do his full part in advancing the science and art of medicine and surgery, and to maintain the high ideals of service and honor which had characterized the great and the noble in the profession who had contributed so much to its progress and elevation. To better qualify himself to do this he did post-graduate work at Johns Hopkins, visited the great surgical clinics of this country, London, Paris, Vienna, and other European cities. He perfected his own technique by operative work on cadavers and increased his experience in abdominal surgery on living anæsthetized dogs. He was as thorough in asepsis and antisepsis, as careful in handling tissue and in the use of sutures and instruments in operating on dogs as he was in operating on the human. His purpose was not merely to do the operation correctly but to get the dog well. It gave him great delight to show the dogs operated on and to call attention to the fact that they were perfectly well.





LEWIS C. MORRIS  
1872-1923





There are members of the profession throughout the South and other states who will ever be grateful to Lewis Coleman Morris because they were correctly taught the fundamental principles of gynecology and abdominal surgery and were inspired by his lofty ideals of preparation and service to higher attainments and greater usefulness. He was ever striving for greater facilities and better methods for teaching these important subjects. As a teacher he was clear, accurate, forceful, and interesting. His didactic lectures were thoroughly prepared and well delivered. In discussing a subject he emphasized the essentials and left out nothing that was important. He was kind, courteous, patient, and considerate, but most exacting in requiring each student to have a thorough knowledge of the subjects taught by him. The importance of the study of the individual patient by the surgeon as well as the internist was always emphasized. He taught that each patient should be thoroughly examined, and that in doing this the student should use his own eyes, his own fingers, his own judgment and that he should know as far as possible the complete history of the case and have all possible laboratory aids in reaching a decision as to the diagnosis. He believed and taught that didactic lectures were only helpful, and that the teacher who depended upon them without practical instruction on the cadaver and living tissue was not discharging his duty to those whom he taught. To supplement his lectures and the study of patients in the hospital and clinic, he required the students in groups to do operative work on cadavers, and also under his own direction or the direction of his associate to do operative work in groups on dogs. He required students of his classes to examine and study cases in the free dispensary. He taught that in case of a surgical mortality it was of the greatest importance that an autopsy be held.

Dr. Morris was intensely interested in medical education. He regarded the hospital—preferably the general charity hospital—as being a vital part of the teaching facilities of a medical college. His wisdom in association with other members of the faculty of the Birmingham Medical College in 1901 in forming an alliance between the college and the Hillman Hospital, which is the general charity hospital of Jefferson County, located in Birmingham, whereby the members of the faculty of the said institution appointed the staff of the said hospital to serve during each session, stamps him and his associates as being far-sighted and correct in their plans for the proper use of the hospital in the practical teaching of medicine and surgery. At that time it was not possible to secure the continuous service for the entire year. The permanent contract with the hospital, however, gave to the medical school indispensable teaching facilities for the scholastic year. Dr. Morris and his associates maintained that it was in the interest of the hospital and the medical school that the teaching faculty constitute the staff of the hospital as a continuous staff, and this was finally achieved when the medical school in 1912 became a part of the University of Alabama.



The insight and forethought of Dr. Morris with reference to medical education was also demonstrated in the position which he took with the faculty of the medical school in 1906, when he urged that the entire property of the school, rights, and privileges including the contract with the Hillman Hospital, be given and conveyed to the trustees of the University of Alabama. He stated then clearly to the faculty that medical education should be conducted by the state universities or by highly endowed institutions. Most of the members of the faculty agreed with him, but at that time it was not possible to get all of them to agree to give the property, as aforesaid, to the University. In 1912 largely through the efforts and influence of Dr. Morris, the interests of those members of the faculty who would not consent to giving the institution to the University were purchased and the institution—all its property, equipment, rights, and privileges—was given to the University of Alabama. At this time Dr. Morris was elected dean in addition to his duties as professor of gynecology and abdominal surgery. Thus, all medical education in Alabama was discontinued except under the auspices and as a part of the University of Alabama.

Those who stand for the highest ideals in medical education throughout the country can appreciate the great service rendered by Dr. Morris, his associates, and the University authorities in placing medical education in Alabama on a unified foundation, directed and conducted by the University of Alabama. This achievement stamps Dr. Morris for all time as being a great leader in medical educational progress. He believed that medical education should be so standardized as to protect the public from men who, through ignorance or lack of professional knowledge and training, are not qualified to practice medicine, but that state boards of examiners should not penalize reputable and capable physicians who have already demonstrated before a similar board having equal requirements and standards that they are competent to practice by requiring them to take an examination. "In all justice, equity and fairness," said Dr. Morris, "I cannot see why a man who has passed a satisfactory examination before a State Board having equal requirements with ours, whose character and standing is certified to by his State Board, should not be accepted by us, whether that State reciprocates with us or not." The foregoing statement was made by Dr. Morris in 1912 when he was president of the Medical Association of Alabama.

The prevention of disease was to Dr. Morris a subject of fundamental importance to the very existence, civilization, well-being, and happiness of mankind. During his administration as president of the Alabama State Medical Association notable work was done in Alabama by the Rockefeller Hookworm Commission. He called attention to the fact that pellagra then constituted a serious menace to the people and urged an intensive study of the disease. He recommended the establishment of a State Hospital for the treatment of tuberculosis, and during his administration such a hospital was built at Wetumpka, Alabama. He urged

the importance of the prevention of rabies and recommended the adoption of ordinances for the control of dogs in communities in which the disease prevailed. He believed that the State Laboratory maintained at public expense should be so adequate and efficient that no hamlet in the confines of the State would be so remote and no patient so poor that he could not without price or cost derive the benefits of modern laboratory findings. During his administration the State Department of Health inaugurated a system throughout the State by which diphtheria antitoxin could be secured at public expense for indigent patients. He recommended a system for legally requiring vital and mortuary reports from the members of the profession which he believed would cause Alabama to be placed in the registration area within 6 months. Thus we see a great and eminently successful surgeon advocating far reaching progressive public health measures of paramount importance in safeguarding the lives and making possible the happiness of the people as a whole.

At the beginning of his career in Birmingham he became a member of the Jefferson County Medical Society and of the Alabama State Medical Association. He was a member of the Birmingham Surgical Society, a Fellow of the American Medical Association, the American Association of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the Southern Surgical Association, and the American College of Surgeons. He had been president of the Jefferson County Medical Society and the Birmingham Surgical Society. In 1910 he was vice-president of the Southern Surgical Association. In 1912 he was president of the Medical Association of Alabama. He took part in all the active work of these societies and read papers which were timely and of great value and importance. Next to his family he derived his greatest pleasure, happiness, and enthusiasm for his work from these meetings and the association with his professional friends.

At the time of his death he was consulting surgeon in Birmingham of the Southern Railroad. He had been for years, and at the time of his death was, a member of the staff of St. Vincent's Hospital, Hillman Hospital, and The Children's Hospital as gynecologist and abdominal surgeon. He was a member of the medical advisory board of Hillman Hospital and chairman of the board of The Children's Hospital. The Morris Memorial Hall, endowed by friends and former patients in the beautiful new building of the latter institution, stands as a lasting monument to his life of service in Birmingham. Indeed, his life work is embodied and enshrined also in the development and enlarged continuous usefulness of St. Vincent's Hospital and the Hillman Hospital. He was cordially welcomed in his professional work to all the hospitals in Birmingham. His unfailing courtesy, hearty cordiality, and marked appreciation of services rendered in behalf of patients, endeared him to nurses and the entire hospital personnel. His diagnostic ability, sound judgment, and great surgical skill were recognized by his colleagues who frequently called him in consultation.



Dr. Morris rarely went to public social functions but was happy in the social affairs of homes. He entertained in his own home in a unique manner. He gave house-parties at his old home in Virginia and enjoyed entertaining his friends at his fishing camp on the river. He made his guests feel that they were at home and that he sincerely enjoyed having them. It gave him great pleasure when a number of his medical and surgical friends joined him on a hunting trip. He loved bird dogs—one of the most famous in the South, Lewis Morris, was named for him. It gave him great pleasure to take his sons to baseball and football games, and while he enjoyed the games, he enjoyed still more the association with his children. He played golf for exercise and recreation.

Lewis Morris is and will continue to be missed by his friends and colleagues. The wholesome influence of his life cannot be eradicated and will continue to do good throughout eternity. He was happy in the thought that he had been permitted to take part in the work of life. He realized that the illness with which he was suffering would possibly cause his passing suddenly at any time. Although conscious of this he did not alter in any way his mode of work and living. He was active in church work being a member of the Episcopal Church; he believed firmly in the Christian religion and had no fear of death. It was not necessary for him to proclaim his religion. Those who knew him recognized that his views on all subjects were sane and well-founded. His life testified that he was a true disciple of the One who said, "Suffer little children to come unto me and forbid them not." These vital principles were instilled within him by his parents from earliest childhood, and constituted the solid foundation of his life. In the most urgent and perplexing surgical emergency and in business, professional and social relations most provocative of anger, he was master of himself and the occasion. In a surgical emergency he did the correct and wise thing; in no relation did he show or give expression to anger or say aught against any one. His high attainments, lofty character, and great success made him free from thoughts of envy and jealousy, and caused him to take great delight in the success of his colleagues and friends.

Dr. Morris was first married to Miss Susie Martin, a lovely and cultured member of a wealthy and influential pioneer family of Jefferson County, Alabama, who lived for less than a year and was survived by one daughter who died in infancy. In 1907 he married Miss Bessie Jemison, a daughter of Mr. Robert Jemison, a great industrial leader in Alabama. Her family is one of the most prominent, influential, and wealthy in the State, and were early settlers and developers of Tuscaloosa and Birmingham. His wife, a beautiful, attractive, cultured, and worthy companion, aided him greatly in his surgical progress and usefulness. He is survived by his wife and three children—Edward Watts Morris, Lewis Coleman Morris, and Miss Elizabeth Morris—who cherish and revere his memory.



Truly the life of Lewis Coleman Morris, master surgeon, devoted husband, father, and true friend, is worthy of emulation not only by all who aspire to be master surgeons but also by all mankind. After having completed a busy day's work, he died suddenly on March 23, 1923, at the dinner table—in the arms of his close friend and secretary, Mr. W. J. Webb—surrounded by his devoted children, his wife being out of the city. No greater eulogy could be expressed on the life and work of any great soul than the words of the one who knew him best: "I feel that he fulfilled perfectly every relation of life."



